

Danesfort Dispatches

A Quarterly Newsletter from the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

January 2013



Vol. 8, Issue 1

Dear American Community,

The political drama of the U.S. election last November has given way to moving forward on the U.S. political business. President Obama was inaugurated to great fanfare on January 21. New members of the cabinet have been nominated and confirmation hearings have already been scheduled for some, including Senator John Kerry for the position of Secretary of State. Soon the President will deliver his State of the Union address to Congress.

Here in Northern Ireland, as we bid goodbye to 2012, we look back on a busy year that included the Irish Open golf tournament, the opening of Titanic Belfast, the opening of the Metropolitan Arts Centre (the MAC), and a visit from U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. From all appearances, 2013 will be another banner year with a series of cultural, political, sporting events featuring Derry~Londonderry City of Culture 2013, the G8 Summit, the World Police and Fire Games and many more. These events will entice visitors, many of them for the first time, to experience the unique culture, friendliness, and beauty of Northern Ireland.

With so many notable happenings here, many have been surprised by the recent protests in parts of the city and surrounding areas. These protests remind us that it is wise to exercise discretion when going about one's daily business. I encourage U.S. citizens residing in Northern Ireland to stay current with media coverage of local events and remain alert to their surroundings at all times. Please remember that even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence.

Wishing you a safe and happy New Year,

Gregory Burton
 Consul General
 U.S. Consulate General Belfast

U.S. Tax Season Approaches

U.S. Embassy London's Internal Revenue Service (IRS) office provides over-the-counter assistance on a first-come, first-serve basis. They can assist with notices, forms, ITIN applications and answer questions to facilitate return preparation. All payments must be made by check, in U.S. dollars.

For a link to IRS Scams, Identity Theft and Fraud visit-

<http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/idtheft.html>

For information on applying for an International Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), go to <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/>

Walk-In Hours - American Embassy,
 Internal Revenue Service
 24 Grosvenor Square
 London W1K 6AH
 Tues-Thur 9:00am-1:00pm; 2:00pm-4:00pm

Phone Hours Phone: [44] (0)20 7894-0477;
 Fax: [44] (0)20 7495-4224
 Mon-Thur 9:00am-12:00pm
 Fri 9:00am-4:00pm

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Travel Advice for Spring and Summer Season



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Spring and summer months are peak travel times for many U.S. citizens. Spring Break, St. Patrick's Day and Easter holidays offer great opportunities to travel with family and friends. This can mean an increased demand for U.S. passport services.

U.S. citizens requiring consular services are thus requested to plan accordingly and apply for passport services well in advance of their expected travel date. We encourage you to contact the U.S. Consulate as early as possible to ensure you receive documents and services in time. Visit our website at <http://belfast.usconsulate.gov/> for more information on passports

Remind U.S. citizens family or friends traveling from the U.S. to Northern Ireland to apply as early as possible for their passports. Now is a great time to apply for your U.S. passport, as demand is traditionally lower.

Children Traveling Without their Parents Or With One Parent:

Adults traveling in or out of the U.S. with children under the age of 18 should be aware that because of increasing incidents of child abductions in disputed custody cases and other crimes against children, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) strongly recommends that unless the child is accompanied by both parents, the accompanying adult should have a notarized document from the child's other parent (or, in the case of a child traveling with grandparents, uncles or aunts, sisters or brothers, or friends, signed by both parents) acknowledging that the wife/husband/etc. is traveling out of the country with the son/daughter and they have permission to do so. An attached copy of parents passport is also useful.

While CBP may not ask to see any documentation, if they do ask and you do not have it, you may be detained until the child's circumstances can be fully assessed. If there is no second parent with legal claims to the child (deceased, sole custody, etc.), carrying paperwork such as a court order, birth certificate naming only one parent, death certificate, etc., would be useful.

For more information visit U.S. Customs and Border Protection - www.cbp.gov

Requirements for non-American family and friends

Non-American family and friends intending to travel to the U.S. visa-free should take the following steps:

- 1) Check eligibility for visa-free travel at <http://london.usembassy.gov/root/visa-wizard/pages/index.html>;
- 2) Once eligibility is confirmed, apply for online ESTA advance travel clearance at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

Passports and Dual Nationality: Frequently Asked Questions

Can I hold more than one passport or nationality?

Yes. In the 1980's, the Supreme Court ruled that citizenship is a constitutional right that cannot be taken away from a citizen who does not intend to relinquish it. Therefore, such actions as naturalization in a foreign country, employment with a foreign government, and/or voting in a foreign election do not automatically jeopardize American citizenship.

I am an American citizen, but also have a foreign passport. Can I use my foreign passport to travel to the United States?

No. Under U.S. law, U.S. citizens must be in possession of a valid U.S. passport to enter or leave the United States. This is true even if you hold a passport from another country. If your U.S. passport has been lost or stolen, or if it has expired, you must apply to replace it before traveling to the United States. For details on passport renewals visit our website at <http://belfast.usconsulate.gov>.



Spotlight: Ten Items You Will Never Get Through U.S. Customs

After that 13 hour international flight, customs might be the last thing on your mind. So, instead of trying to juggle jet lag, kids, AND luggage declarations, read this easy guide to prohibited and restricted items before you go.

1) Absinthe

Forget the kind of absinthe you saw in *The Moulin Rouge*, today's absinthe isn't hallucinogenic. Nevertheless, CBP regulations require that any absinthe brought to the US is "thujone free," less than 10 parts per million of thujone (aka "wormwood", the chemical supposed to be mind-altering). Also, the term "absinthe" cannot appear on the label and the artwork cannot display any psychotropic images. For more information about bringing absinthe and all other alcoholic beverages to the US, click on this [link](#).



2) Certain plants (and crafts made from plants)

If you're bringing any plant or plant products, including straw, into the US, you will need to present it to a customs officer for inspection. Although cut flowers with berries attached, nursery stock, and seeds appear harmless, they require permits.

"Noxious weeds," aren't allowed under any circumstances.

Travel Tip: You can apply for a USDA Plant Protection and Quarantine permit [online](#)—or check if they're prohibited. Permits take 30 days or more to process and are good for up to three years.

3) Ivory (including jewelry made from ivory)

Due to the Endangered Species Act, any ivory brought into the country will usually require a [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permit](#). You can import an antique ivory item if you have special documentation showing it's more than 100 years old, but thanks to wildlife poaching, any object that's younger is generally not allowed.

Travel Tip: If decide to go on a tortoiseshell, ivory, or whalebone shopping spree, make sure you can bring home your new trinkets home by giving the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service a jingle at (800) 358-2104.

4) ANCIENT ARTIFACTS

Be aware that U.S. law requires an export permit for any artifacts like pre-Columbian objects, Native artifacts, Byzantine items, and culturally significant Iraqi property, to name a few. In addition, make export certificate you get is a real one--there are many fakes floating around! The U.S. National Property Act prevents individuals from legally owning a swiped item, regardless of how many people have since possessed it.

Travel Tip: Even with an export permit, you could face U.S. import restrictions, depending on the item and the country. Take a look at the [U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs's website](#) for information on what's not allowed.



American
sure that the
Stolen

5) Meat-based products

This one is easy to overlook. Meat, even when found in things like soup mixes, bouillon, or pet food, are normally not admissible. For example, African bush meat made from wildlife is not well regulated and has been known to contain serious pathogens such as Ebola. To prevent the spread of diseases like mad cow disease, foot-and-mouth disease and the avian flu to the U.S., meats are not allowed (this includes canned and dried meat). There are a few countries deemed acceptable to export certain meats from—scan the USDA's website to make sure: www.aphis.usda.gov/.

6) Souvenirs from Cuba, Iran, Burma, or much of Sudan

Embargoes against these countries mean that any merchandise you bring back will generally require a license. It is up to the Office of Foreign Assets Control to grant such licenses and you should be aware that they are rarely issued.

Travel Tip: A few exceptions to this rule exist: Books, magazines, films, photographs, posters, art, and music are okay, as are small gifts worth less than \$100.



(Continued on page 4)

U.S. Customs Restrictions (continued)

(Continued from page 3)

7) Most fruits and vegetables

Forget to eat that banana on your flight over? It only takes one piece of fruit to cause pest infestations such as the California Mediterranean fruit fly outbreak of the early 1980s. California, one of the world's most productive agricultural regions, spent \$100 million to eliminate the fruit fly. All because of one piece of illegal fruit! However, if you must bring fruit, check out [this website](#) first. Nearly every fruit and veggie will require a permit. Customs officers will want you to declare all fruits and veg, especially exotic fruit like pomegranates. Saving a few minutes at the airport probably isn't worth the \$300 fine you'll incur!

8) Designer knockoffs and cartoon-character paraphernalia



Finding a good fake Louis Vuitton may be the highlight of your trip but these items are subject to U.S. copyright and trademark protections. Disney and other cartoon knockoffs are included in this too.

Travel Tip: If you just want one fake bag to use for yourself (NOT for resale) that's okay: You can be granted an exemption by the government. But know that you can only bring one item of its kind into the country—so a pair of sunglasses, a purse, and a pair of jeans are okay, but three purses are not, regardless of whether they have three different labels. Another note: You can only get this exemption once every 30 days.

9) More than \$10,000 cash

Smuggling "bulk currency" is strictly prohibited by U.S. Immigration and Customs. Money orders, travelers' checks, and foreign coins—not just paper bills—count too.

Travel Tip: To bring your money in legally, obtain the exhaustively named "Report of International Transportation of Currency of Monetary Instruments" from a customs officer. If you don't, you could face up to five years in jail.

10) Some Haitian Goat Hide Drums

Some goat-skin drums aren't treated properly, and have been linked to a cutaneous anthrax case, putting them on the Centers for Disease Control's restricted list. Same goes for some African drums. Make sure any drum purchases you make have been tanned, as that means it's non-infectious.

World Police & Fire Games 2013

The World Police and Fire Games (WPFG) arrives in Belfast in 2013. The event takes place from 1st - 10th of August and aims to attract 25,000 visitors from over 70 countries. It will include an estimated 10,000 competitors competing in around 57 sports, plus 15,000 friends and family.

The Games represent an amazing opportunity to raise Belfast's profile internationally and leave a lasting legacy for Northern Ireland. It is estimated that it will inject at least £16.3m into the local economy.

Download 2013 WPFG Ltd's [Strategic and Business and Plan 2012-14](#)

2013 WPFG Ltd is overseen by a Board of Directors chaired by Judith Gillespie, Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The Board comprises representatives from the organisations listed below, along with independent members

For more details visit their website at <http://www.2013wpfg.com>



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Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)



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Stay Informed.

Sign up for our free Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (formerly known as “Travel Registration” or “Registration with Embassies”) to receive the latest travel updates and information! When you sign up, you will automatically receive the most current information we compile about the country where you will be traveling or living. You will also receive updates, including Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts (where appropriate). You only need to sign up once, and then you can add and delete trips from your account based on your current travel plans!

Stay Connected.

By connecting with us on the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, we will be able to assist you better in case of an emergency, such as if you lose your passport or it is stolen while you are abroad.

We also assist U.S. citizens in other emergencies, such as in natural disasters. For example, after the earthquake in Haiti, we evacuated over 16,700 U.S. citizens and family members. During the civil unrest in Lebanon in 2006 we assisted nearly 15,000 U.S. citizens and family members, and in 2004 we helped thousands more during the tsunami.

The travel and contact information you enter into our Smart Traveler Enrollment Program will make it easier for consular officers in U.S. embassies and consulates around the world to contact you and your loved ones during an emergency—including situations where your family or friends in the U.S. are having problems trying to contact you with important news.

Stay Safe.

We believe that a well-informed traveler is a safer traveler. Our consular officers around the world compile country-specific information, travel alerts, travel warnings, fact sheets and emergency messages to provide you with timely and accurate travel information about every country where you may travel.

We include reports on possible risks and security threats so that you can make informed decisions.

[Click here to login now - Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)

Your Privacy is Paramount

All personal information you provide to us is protected under the Privacy Act of 1974. This law prohibits us from sharing the information with anyone *without your written authorization*. Certain exceptions exist, such as when we need to share information on a limited basis in order to protect your safety and welfare in

Social Security: “When Should I Start Taking My Benefits?”

The answer very much depends on your individual circumstances. The good news is that there are many tools that will help you make up your mind. In general, to qualify for retirement benefits you need to have worked in the United States for at least 10 years. However, there are bilateral agreements with various countries, which mean you may qualify for smaller pensions if you have worked in any of those countries (including the United Kingdom) in addition to the time that you worked in the United States. If you have received a Social Security Statement recently, you should have a reasonable idea of what to expect in the way of benefits when the time comes for you to retire. But please read all of the details in the Statement as other factors (such as a foreign pension) may affect the final amount that you will ultimately receive.

The general gist is this: Delaying Social Security makes financial sense. If you delay retirement until after you reach your full retirement age (please check our website www.socialsecurity.gov to calculate your full retirement age) you will be entitled to about 8% a year more for each full year that you delay taking the benefits until you reach age 70, when you would receive the maximum benefits that you are eligible for. You can of course, choose to claim benefits at age 62, but your benefits will be permanently lower, for some, as much as 25% less.

For more information on benefits and benefit amounts visit: www.socialsecurity.gov. For more information about your individual circumstances please contact the Federal Benefits Unit at the U.S.

Embassy: FBU.London@ssa.gov. visit our webpage at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/fbu/index.html.



Culture Corner

The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. This quarter, we encourage you to check out:

Chinese New Year Celebrations - February 10-25, 2013 Ulster Hall hosts the New Year celebrations. 2013 marks the Year of the Snake and the entertainment includes traditional Chinese performances as well as art and craft workshops and specialist food stalls. Visit the Chinese Welfare Association website <http://cwa-ni.org>.

Belfast Jazz Festival - March 20-23, 2013 - Visit their website at <http://www.movingonmusic.co.uk>

8th Panarts Belfast Nashville Songwriter's Festival - February 22-26, 2012. One of the best events on the music calendar, this festival is supported by the U.S. Consulate. It provides a scintillating jam - packed five days featuring the very best in song writing & performing. The line-up includes Nanci Griffith, Bap Kennedy & Band, John Oates, Todd Snider, Nick Lowe & Band, and many, many more! Details at www.belfastnashville.com.

Disclaimer: Listing of events and performances is for information purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Consulate Belfast. All opinions expressed by the artists, writers, and performers participating or contributing to the events listed are those solely of the participants and contributors and not the U.S. Government or its designated representatives. Information is believed to be correct at the time it is listed but the U.S. Consulate accepts no liability for subsequent changes to these details and no reliance should be placed upon them.

American Citizen Services: In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S. Citizen in Northern Ireland, our after-hours phone number is 01253-501106.

Consular Closure Dates

The U.S. Consulate General Belfast will be closed on the following dates:

Monday, February 18, 2013 - President's Day

Monday, March 18, 2013 - St. Patrick's Day

Friday, March 29, 2013 - Good Friday

Monday, April 1, 2013 - Easter Monday

Tuesday, April 2, 2013 - Easter Tuesday

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Superbowl XLVII Party 02/03/13

Madison's Hotel & Nightclub, Botanic Avenue. Belfast

The Belfast Trojans, the Irish American Football League National Champions, are hosting Irelands biggest Superbowl Party on Sunday February 3rd at Belfast's Madison's Hotel, doors open at 21:00.

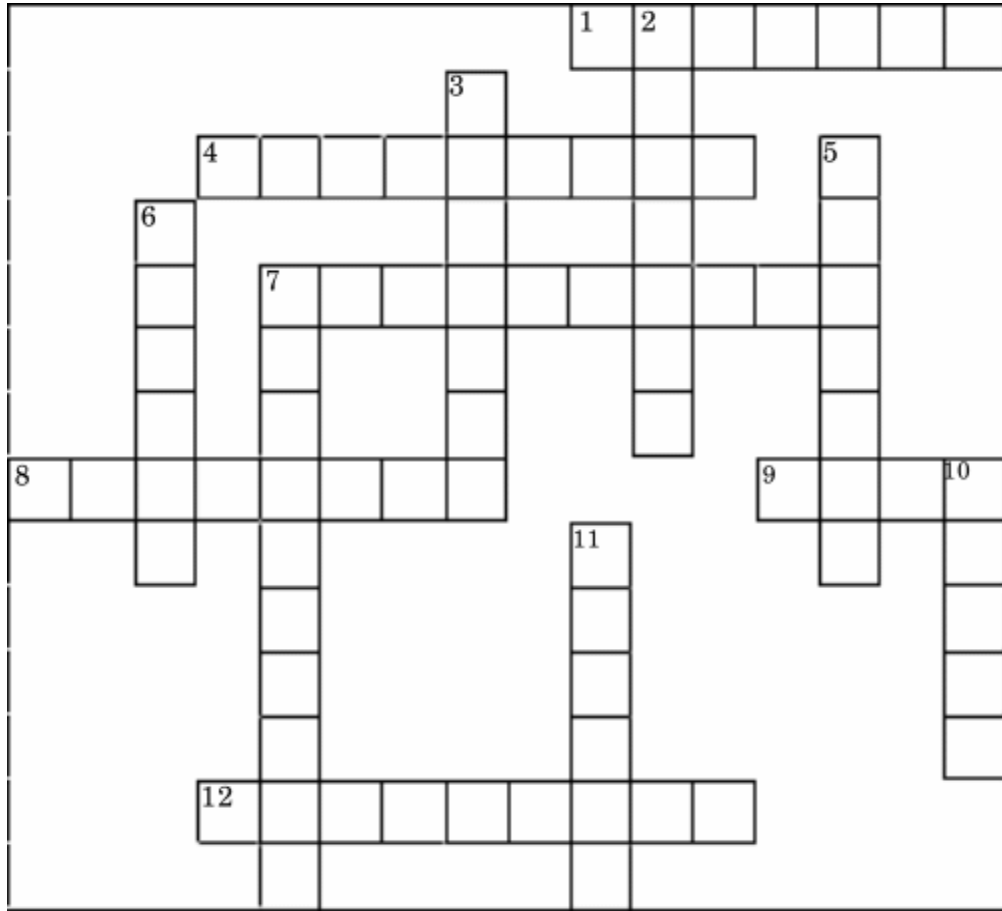
There'll be multiple screens showing the big game spread over two distinct levels in the Hotel.

There will be a beer promotion through partners Budweiser, competitions, VIP guests and Tailgate party style food available throughout the game.

Most important of all you get to watch it all in the company of NI's thriving American Football community.

KID'S CORNER

President's Day



Across

- 1 A major reason for Civil War
- 4 Highest executive office
- 7 President lives here
- 8 Day of your birth
- 9 Cast this to elect president
- 12 Nickname for 16th president

Down

- 2 Was 16th president
- 3 Record of past events
- 5 Right to make choices
- 6 Kind of tree George cut down
- 7 Last name of first president
- 10 In balance
- 11 Silver Coin George threw

Across: 1. Slavery 4. President 7. White House 8. Birthday 9. Vote 12. Honest Abe. **Down:** 2. Lincoln 3. History 5. Free-dom 6. Cherry 7. Washington 10. Equal 11. Dollar.